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The Collaborative Approach of Career Development programs and MSc Management courses; Its Impact on the Employability of Post-Graduate students: A case Study of NTU

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Abstract: The purpose of this research is to understand students' perception on this subject matter and how aware they are about their career and employability. Emphasis will be laid on the various skills and strength students possess and should possess that determines how employable they get and how they manage their career. In assessing this issue, review of existing literatures on this subject matter will be considered followed by a brief analysis of our research question, hypothesis and our predictions. On the other hand, analysis of our research methods, a description of our sample, sample selection and representatives of our sample. Presentation of our findings will be done and then evaluating our findings that would be closely followed by the limitations of this research work and concluding remarks.

Keywords: Postgraduate students, Employability, Career, Management

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I. Introduction

According to Coughlan (2010), UNESCO proved that the rate at which international student's troop in from all over the world to the U.K to acquire a second degree is increasing drastically over the year. Employability of these students have been of great interest to be looked into as the rate of unemployment in so many country is alarming especially in the western economy (Andrew et al., 2009). Furthermore, the career choices of these students involve pursuit of remunerations to be achieved on the long run such as the monthly income, preferred occupation, independence and improvement on skills they possess (Saunders & Fogarty, 2001). However, some students are not aware and are not prepared for their career path. Super (1996) added that awareness, preparation and managing ones career requires individual to focus on the future. The big question here is how well these students are aware of preparing and managing their career and employability.

However, the dialogue into employability constantly overlooks the *subjective* aspect of employability; especially how it relates to not only the way persons come to identify and apprehend the labour market they are going into but also the nature, approaches and uniqueness they cultivate around their future work and employability (Brown et al., 2004). The purpose of this research is to understand students' perception on this subject matter and how aware they are about their career and employability. Emphasis will be laid on the various skills and strength students possess and should possess that determines how employable they get and how they manage their career.

1.1 Research questions and objectives:

1.1.1 Research questions

- What skills, strengths and attributes do students perceive to be important for building and fully preparing them for their career?
- Does the MSc management course create employment opportunities for students?

1.1.2 Research objectives.

- To identify the factors and attributes that students think are important for preparing them for their career.
- To establish whether the MSc management course provides more opportunity for students in terms of employment.
- To identify if postgraduate students actively engage themselves in career development programs.

- To identify if career development programs offered by the university are useful to the postgraduate students career development.

II. Literature Review

Employability has been seen in so many perspectives from different authors. Rothwell and Arnold (2007), employability as a future-oriented perspective of an individual having awareness of and preparation to face the future of the labour market. However, Hillage and Pollard (2005, p.25) defined employability as ‘the ability to realise potential through sustainable employment’. Forrier and Sels (2003) added that employability is a multi-faceted construct with both internal and external dimensions. Yorke (2006) argued that employability is an accomplishment attained from having skills and potentials that gives the capabilities of procuring a job and becoming a success and been able to give back to the society and economy. Rothwell and Arnold (2008) added that employability is the perceived ability to get viable employment fitting to ones level of qualification. The way individual sees employability and career management differs. Hall & Associates (1986, p.3) has defined career as ‘a lifelong process made up of sequence of activities and related attitudes or behaviours that take place in a person’s work life’. It can also be seen as an outline of work linked to experience such as position, duties, choices, aims, anticipations, values, desires and feelings about specific work experiences that span the path of a person’s life (Greenhaus et al., 2000). Baruch (2004) argued that career depends on the individual and that they are accountable to cater for and shape their own career in conjunction with organisation and universities. Hence, career management demands the initiative of the individual and the organisation in order to get determined benefit.

Career development involves an organised, planned and formalised effort of developing an individual to be beneficial to the individual and also the organisation. Greenhaus et al., (2000) added that it’s an on-going process through series of stages, tests, issues and tasks. John Brennan and colleagues in 2001 analysed the views of employers on what skills they expect from people seeking employment and some of them are teamwork, taking responsibilities, time management, planning and organising and a whole lot more.

Since late 90s in the UK, the government has been really concerned about the employability of students in relation to the type of education they have gotten from the university if it correlates with the skills required by employers (Mason et al., 2003). However, there is an apprehension about if these universities and the modules taken in school make available for graduates the international frame of mind to qualify them to hold out the pressure of competition from the employment market. Furthermore, developing good skills such as being self-sufficient, innovative and critical evaluation qualifies for employability when developed (Watson, 2011). Knight and Yorke (2007) implies that the effectiveness of graduate has to do with the individual qualities that empower them to win and to stimulate some achievement in their chosen career path. Harvey et al., (2003) objected that “employ ability” should be considered as being the primary apprehension and see the improvement of ability in employment as a result of some developmental processes which depends on the active commitment of the graduate. The proposition that some attributes are built on getting employed is generally accepted (Lane et al., 2000; Rajan et al., 2000) but employability is not only about personal attributes, current internal and external state(s) of the labour market as well as demand for a particular type of occupation might affect employability (Kirschenbaum and Mano-Negrin, 1999; Mallough and Kleiner, 2001).

On the other hand, the experiences of students is relative as differences in culture, age, intellectual intelligence, job experiences and people affects the perception of individual which affects the basis to which they make decisions. Students, Management Course and employability is very important to consider as most students do not feel prepared as well as if a link is created between the management course and employability.

III. Findings And Discussions

The research findings from the questionnaires and interviews are discussed in this section. A face to face questionnaire was admitted to MSc Management students in Nottingham Trent University (NTU). A total of 50 students of different nationalities were administered questionnaire from the targeted population. Also, to effectively arrive at a conclusion, 10 students were interviewed and their answers were recorded and transcribed to uncover additional relevant information to bolster the questionnaire analysis. Nationality of respondents were categorised into Eastern Asia, Western Asia, Southern Asia, Eurasia, Africa and Europe.

2.1.1 Data Presentation and Analysis

2.1.2 Demographics of participants

From the questionnaire survey, there were 50 students including 56% Eastern Asians (Chinese, Taiwanese, Koreans), 4% Western Asians, 10% Southern Asian, 2% Eurasian, 16% Africans (Nigerians, Cameroonian, Senegalese, Ghanaians) and 12% Europeans are studying the MSc Management course in NTU. This analysis shows that most of the students who are respondents are international students. This shows that in Europe, United Kingdom especially, students migrate in large numbers to acquire a degree from the UK to build

their career as to have better edge amongst their peers and contemporaries in their home country (Ashforth et al, 2004).

3.1.2.1 Full time work experiences and how long?

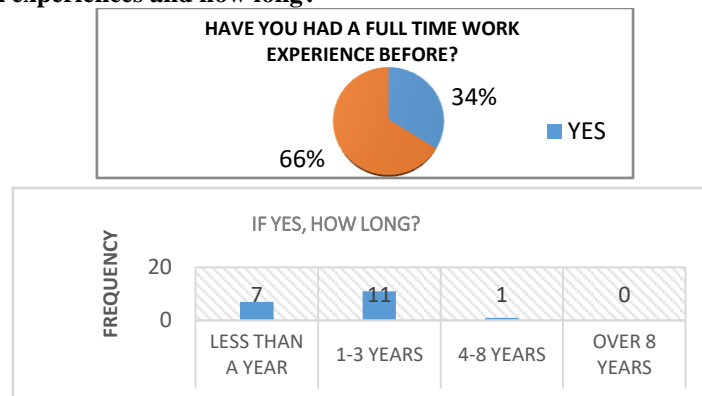


Fig 1. Full Time Work Experience

Majority of the respondents have not had any full time work experience before while some have had. The length of this job experience also varies. From the above data representation, 33 respondents out of 50 have not had any work experience before, this shows that some have got experiences before proceeding for the MSc Management degree. 36.8% of respondents have had less than a year work experience, 57.9% have had between one to three years’ work experience, 5.3% have four to eight years’ experience while none have had over eight years. Work experience has been a very important part of career building. These experience has been one major criteria employers expect of potentials employees as this helps build some confidence in them to be able to handle designated jobs well (Turner et al., 2010). Work experience gives insight, places you in the real life scenario and helps develop skills and techniques for a successful working relationship. However, some students reason for work experience differ as some wants to make more money and some does not want to study anymore (Pillai et al., 2012). Some actually were not able to get work experience because of lack of job and most of them had to proceed to study more(BBC, 2012).An interview with one of the respondents states that “I have not had any work experience before because I applied in my country but it was not forthcoming so I applied to do my master degree instead of sitting doing nothing”(Respondent A). These and many more must have amounted to the high increase in those that have not had work experience before.

3.1.2.2 Diversion to Management and Reasons

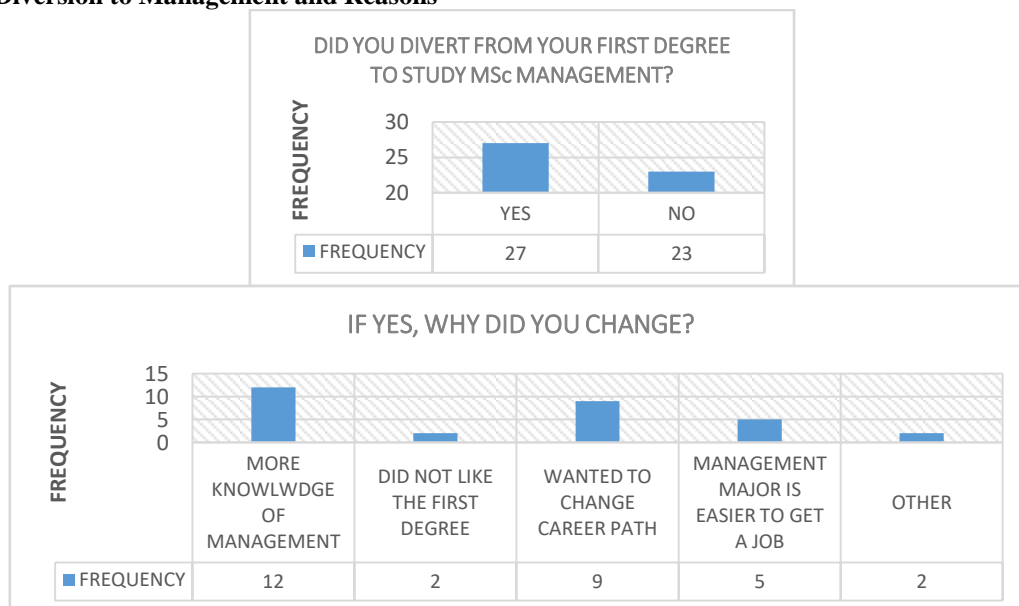


Fig 2: Diversion from First Degree

At the verge of focusing on a career path, gaining skills and more knowledge to be marketable and employable (Nurita et al., 2010), most students divert from their first degree of study into another field or a

similar field. As seen in fig 2 above, most of the respondents diverted in other to acquire more knowledge while some wanted to change their career path. Some students feel management course is easy to get a job while some had other reasons why they diverted. A few of the respondents did not divert at all. When asked from one of the interview respondents, it was gathered that the respondent diverted to the management course to be able to focus more on the career path chosen, acquire more skills as well as getting a job faster.

However, it is important to investigate into the perception of respondents and students on whether the management course is important and gives them a better edge. The below chart describes the response respondents gave.

3.1.2.3 Is the management course important and provides enough knowledge and opportunity.

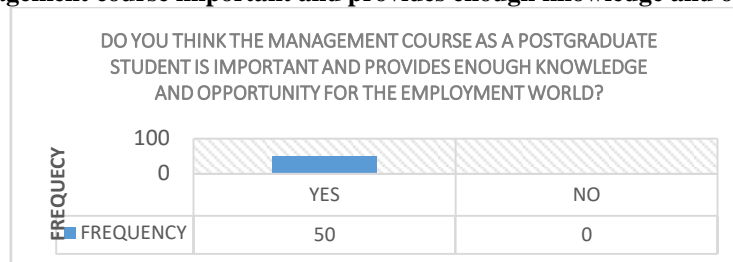


Fig 3: The Importance of the Management course

As the world grows to the level of uncertainty, both employees and employers have to increase skills level but the skills of employees are important to the success of a business. However, learning is defined as “the process whereby individuals acquire knowledge, skills and attitudes through experience, reflection, study or instruction” (cited in Pinnington and Edwards, 2000, p. 185). Bakan (2010) argued that the importance of management courses at the postgraduate level cannot be over-emphasised as they are significant and make available enough knowledge and opportunity for the employment world. The results found in this research, as seen on fig 3 above, correspond with his views seeing as 100% of respondents gave a positive answer when asked. On the other hand, Lees (2002) supports an opposing view on the topic; he argues that although it is important in some cases but not in all as some postgraduate students do not still possess the level of skills expected by employers. The analysis above justifies that the MSc management course offers opportunity for students in terms of employment opportunity and provides enough knowledge.

3.1.2.4 Support programmes and how helpful it was

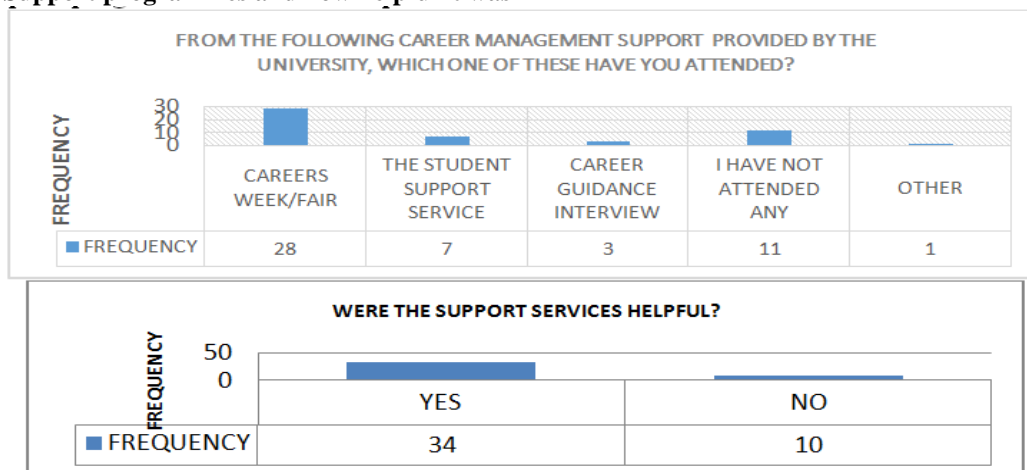


Fig 4: Responses to how helpful the support provided was

In analysing the data represented in fig 4 above, it is evident that majority of the sample (56%) attended the careers week fairs; a significantly higher interest than any other career support service. It is conceivable that this may be as a result of the careers week being perceived as a less formal, “no pressure” set of events in comparison to the other career management support services available. This assumption is supported by one of the interviewees saying “It looked like fun with all the stalls and colours ... why not?” But on the other hand, based on a response from another interviewee, a reasonable percentage of students have not attended any because they do not see it as important and they feel these services do not prepare them for the future. Nonetheless, over 70% of the respondents stated that the career support programmes were helpful. Therefore, it

can be established that most postgraduate students engage themselves in career development programs offered by the university and it is helpful to them.

However, actions have been taken by some students to improve on their employability and career management.

3.1.2.5 Actions Taken to Improve.

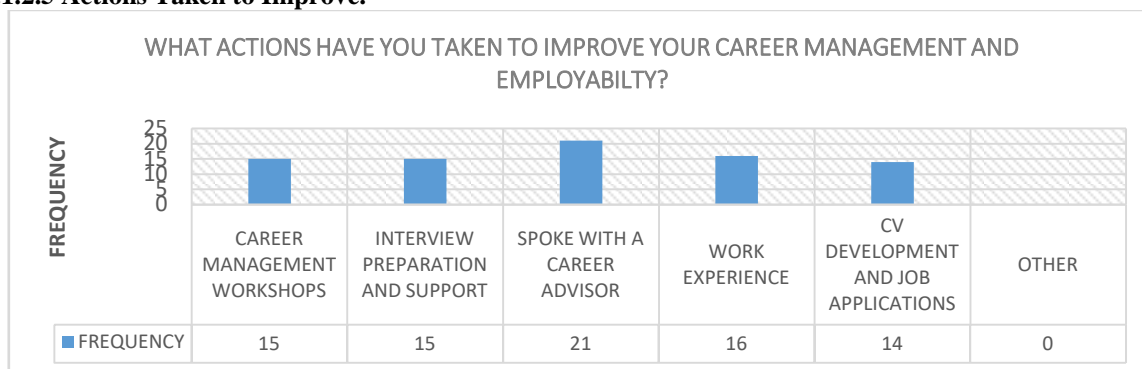


Fig 5: Actions that have been taken

Watts (2002) highlighted career workshops and modules as an important action that should be undertaken. These could relate to developing self-awareness and interacting positively and effectively with a changing and growing career life. Interview preparation and support is also very important as employees have to be prepared and possess required quality and skills employers expect (Folsom & Reardon, 2003). Speaking with a career advisor makes it a lot faster for some people to improve on their career development (Kumar, 2007). Work experience is also important as most employers of labour tend to consider aspiring employee with work experience (Schneider, 2005). Griffiths et al., (2000) found that students apprehend the link between work experience and skill development. This builds some confidence in them that the designated task would be done with little or no fault (Holmes, 2001). CV development and job application is also a very significant action as without CV development and job application in most cases, these jobs might not be gotten. From fig 4.6 above, 30.6% took action on career management modules and workshop as well as interview preparation and support. 42.9% spoke with a career advisor, 32.7% have work experience and 28.6% have applied for jobs and developed CVs.

After the actions taken, students looking to building up and managing their own career has to develop specific and unique skills to be able to stand out amongst peers. The below graph shows more on that.

3.1.2.6 Skills students have and have developed

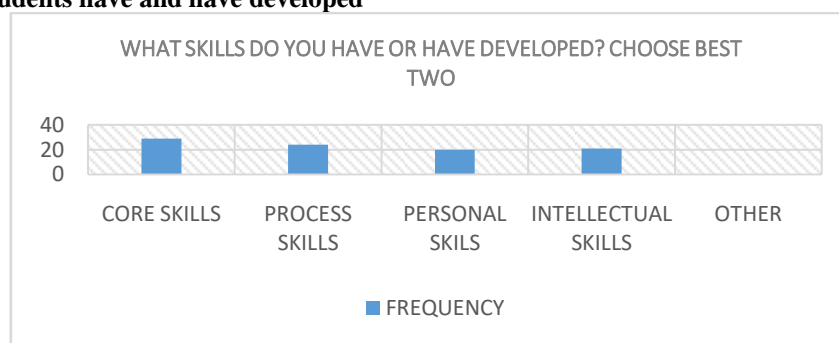


Fig 6: List of skills students possess and have developed

Employers of labour expect that employees should possess skills that distinguishes them as well as possessing more than one skill (Cassidy, 2006). Core skills which comprises of critical thinking, presentation, writing, Reading, language, oral, verbal and research skills. Process skills comprises of ICT skills, Ethical skills, planning and problem solving skills. Personal skills comprises of reflectiveness, self-confidence, awareness and independence. Intellectual skills entail teamwork, leadership, decision making, generating new ideas and taking up responsibilities (Allen, 2011). From fig 6 above, the percentage of those that have and developed core skills are high as well as the other skills have high percentage of students that possess it as well. Response from an interviewee was that

“NTU has made me developed some of these skills because back in india, it was more of the individual and independent work but since I started MSc, I had a different view about that and I have been able to pick up and develop some more skills” (Respondent B).

This shows that the skills MSc management course offers have a good impact on the student and they are developing them with time.

3.1.2.7 Most important factor in preparing for your career



Fig 7: Important Factors for Career Preparation

Lot of factors might influence the building of a persons career but the most important factor which is shown in the analysis above is work experience. From fig 7 above, the percentage of work experience is 56% while educational background is 32%. 12% thinks interest is important but interest of people differs and the way it influences the building of a persons career difers as well. Earlier studies have shown that most tutors often talk and emphasis to students more on school work and education but finds it difficult to widen and expand their viewpoint to possible careers and professional work practices (Mittendorff, 2010; Winters et al., 2009). Cranmer (2006) and Tymon (2011) further added that education and interest matters but without an experience in the career path, then the chances of high level of peparation and success is slim and low. Responses from an interview states as follows:

“Educational background is good but it is better to gain experience in the field. This means that school work should be more of practical than theoretical” (Respondent B).

The analysis above justifies and identifies the major factors students think is the most important in developing their career.

The below analysis identifies further improvement the university can put in place to help develop employability opportunities, skills and career development.

3.1.2.8 What more do you think the university can do to help develop employability & career development?

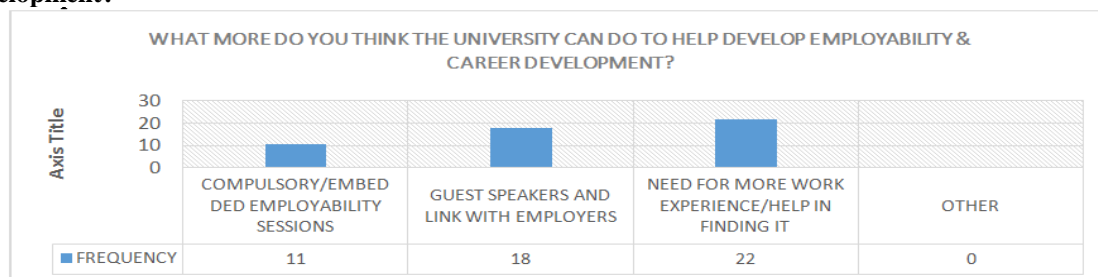


Fig 8: Help needed for Employability and Career development

As fig 8 pointed and identified that the most important actor to building career is wok experience, considering what more the university can do to help develop employability and career management is very important. Barthope et al., (2006) added that students should be allowed face the real life scenario instead of just the imaginary aspect of education and learning. From the analysis above, 22% of students went for compulsory/Embedded employability sessions while 36% went for guest speakers and link with employers. The putting together of these three factors should be put into considered by the university because these three would give students better edge amongst their peers in developing their career and getting employed.

IV. Limitation Of Study

- Time constraint was a limitation for this research. Data allocation time was limited. Also the findings from this study may not be generalised to a more broad population as the research was more of exploratory and has concentrated on MSc management students in NTU.

- The sample was geographically limited. The collected data in other universities in the UK or other parts of the UK may produce different results.

V. Conclusion

This research shows that the evolution from higher education to be employable encompasses an active progression for students. The problem of career management and employability now seems to be apprising students' understanding and the steps ahead. Students see their employability as a fundamental issue that needs to be discussed and worked at. This not only encompasses educational development and credential development but also skills in the employment world (Zhiwen et al., 2008).

The study of student approaches and positioning also points out the variances amongst students in their methodologies to forthcoming work and careers. Students' orientations to the employment world not only revealed the way they were starting to recognize and manage their employability, but also their efforts to achieve their career expectations and ambitions. The result of this study was based on two research questions: it tried to examine the skills and attributes students perceive to be important in getting employed and preparing for their career in relation with what past scholars have said. Furthermore, it also examined if the management course builds them for career management and employability.

This research has shown that some students are apparently aware of their career and have a target to achieve while some are still yet to discover them. These students recognise that work experience is the most important in preparing them for their future career. Although educational background was also seen as important but when knowledge is acquired, it is better to make it work in the real life (Yorke, 2006). These makes the students feel more confident, knowledgeable and prolific in developing their career and skills and facing the real world.

Nevertheless, it has been established that although the MSc Management course and the university provides opportunity for students do develop skills and their career but they are not fully engaged in the opportunities provided for them. The result specified that issues related to career management are rarely on the disposition of career conversations, a finding similar to what we perceived in the earlier observational study (Mittendorff et al., 2010). However, it is recommended that direct teaching sometimes does not work out well but leaving students to discover themselves through self-directedness in career guidance (Charlotte et al., 2012). Furthermore, hidden curriculum and informal learning processes are significant sources of learning.

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